Prior knowledge is the knowledge that stems from previous experience. Prior knowledge can be explained as a combination of the learner's preexisting attitudes, experiences, and knowledge. (Farrell, 2004) Explicitly teaching strategies that proficient readers use when trying to make sense out of text helps to deepen understanding and create independent readers. This is why prior knowledge is important. Prior knowledge can expand learning. Prior knowledge is the total knowledge of an individual as of now.

Prior Knowledge can be good or bad. Children are learning from birth and may enter class with a great deal of useful information that can be applied to lessons to encourage a deeper understanding. Children today have increasing levels of technology in particular. All of this prior knowledge can be useful for helping them grow and learn. (POTENTIAL SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE, 2008)

Students from more well off areas have more tools at their disposal to work with. That will make those students have more knowledge for school. These students will have an advantage over less privileged kids. The less privileged kids will have fewer tools to work will then fall behind without even starting school. The less privileged kids will then have to catch up, because of their lack of prior knowledge.

According to noted learning theorist Jean Piaget, accessing prior knowledge is how children make sense of the world. They attempt to take new information and fit it into existing knowledge in order to create a schema, or mental map that fits into a specific category. (Farrell, 2004) This makes the information more accessible because it is more memorable. Teachers should make every effort to encourage children to access their previously learned knowledge to help them to better understand what they are learning.

Prior Knowledge can come from many different things:

**Attitudes**

* + Beliefs about ourselves as learners
  + Awareness of our individual interests and strengths
  + Motivations

**Experiences**

* + Everyday activities
  + Events in our lives that provide background understanding
  + Family and community experiences that we bring to school with us

**Knowledge**

* + Of the readings
  + Of content (literature, science, and math)
  + Of topics
  + Of concepts
  + Of the academic and personal goals (Steif, 1995)

A way to teach prior knowledge skills:

1. Before reading a text selection, teacher facilitates a group discussion about the central concepts

2. Conversation starters:

“What comes to mind when you hear the word (or phrase) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

What do you already know about the text?

What does this remind you of?

Based on your prior knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, what questions come to mind?

What information might be in this text?

What do you know that will help you understand the text?

What is your schema for this text?

Do the words and pictures remind you of something else that you’ve read?

What do the pictures tell you about the text?

This text makes me think about…

3. Selected text is read.

4. Discuss with students how thinking about the topic before reading helped them understand

Discuss any misconceptions that the students may have had before reading the text. (Steif, 1995)

# Works Cited

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